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AUTHOR	Newmann, Fred M.
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ABSTRACT

A rationale is developed for a training program in social action. The educational objective, to increase students' ability to exert influence in public affairs, is defined and justified. Justification is based on theories of the nature of democracy, the nature of morality, and the nature of psychological growth. The proposed social action curriculum is discussed and the author projects both possible negative and positive consequences of such a program. (SHM)

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CHAPTER 1

LEARNING TO EXERT INFLUENCE IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS THROUGH SOCIAL ACTION

A RATIONALE

by

Fred M. Newmann
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
University of Wisconsin
Madison, WI 53706

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I. Definition of the Objective

We begin by defining and justifying a primary educational objective: to increase students' ability to exert influence in public affairs. Public affairs are those issues of concern to groups of people to which, it is generally agreed, institutions of government should respond—through legislation, administrative action, judicial opinion, etc. Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish between private and public affairs. A student may feel that his parent has unjustly denied him use of the family auto. Though at first glance a private dispute within a family, the problem could be escalated to a public issue if the student attempted to challenge the constitutionality of legislation and court rulings which deny certain rights to "minors," and which give parents certain powers to infringe upon the "liberty" of their children "without due process of law." Rather than classifying issues categorically as either private or public, it is more helpful to view them on a continuum. A problem becomes "public" as increasing numbers of people are concerned with its resolution and as it becomes interpreted as falling within the realm of governmental interests. To the extent that a problem is viewed as idiosyncratic to individuals, rather than groups, and to the extent that it is not deemed to fall within governmental interests, it should be considered private.*

What does it mean to exert influence in public affairs? We can imagine another continuum as in Figure 1. At one end is the ability to

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*Much of the business of public affairs consists in determining which matters should be resolved through governmental channels. When specific public policy is advocated to deter government from encroachment on private life (e.g., prohibitions on electronic eavesdropping or laws protecting confidentiality of doctor-patient relationships), the struggle in setting those policies becomes a public affair.

FIGURE 1. EXERTING INFLUENCE

develop one's positions or views and make them known to others. At the other end is the ability to implement one's views or have them adopted as public policy. As one attempts to implement his preferred views, he will in most cases probably not see his precise wishes or ideals fulfilled. Policies that are adopted, if not clearly in opposition to one's wishes, will usually contain modifications or compromises of one's original views. Similarly, candidates who win election will not usually fit one's conception of the ideal official, but they may be considered satisfactory. A person who has been actively attempting to influence such policies or choice of officials might consider himself having a moderate amount of influence, falling somewhere on the midsection of the continuum.* The goal is to educate students in a way that will enable them to work toward the right side of the spectrum.

While the right side of the spectrum may suggest that each student should learn how to impose his views on the world, this is not the general intent of "ability to exert influence." Even if we were capable of achieving this interpretation, it would be indefensible as an objective for two major reasons. First, it would be ethically irresponsible unconditionally to endorse any view on public affairs that a student might profess. If a student wishes to bomb a building in protest against a way, the teacher is not obligated to help him, even though the student may believe this will help him

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*Whether one can reasonably attribute the outcomes of policy decisions or public affairs to one's attempts to exert influence is a problem in cause-effect reasoning which we cannot address here. It is an issue of continuing concern for activists, but its resolution is not crucial to the definition or justification of the educational objective we propose.

implement his views and exert influence on public policy. On the contrary, in such cases the teacher may be morally obligated to make it impossible for the student to implement his views. Rather than giving a blank check to students to exercise their will as they see fit, I am assuming that study and discussion on the ethics of the policies one supports and on the actions one takes is a moral responsibility of students and staff. A recommended approach to such moral deliberation is discussed below in Chapter 2. Such deliberation may result in conflict between school and students over what policies and approaches to social action should be taken. At this point I cannot present a scheme for resolving such conflict. The point here is that the goal of generally increasing one's ability to exert influence does not necessarily entail or require the school's support of every policy or action the student may prefer.

For another reason we must not equate exerting influence with the right to win or unilaterally to implement one's views at all times. It is logically impossible to conceive of a social system that accpeted this principle, for it would require that persons of differing views each have the ability to realize their preferred policies. However, the resolution of controversy over public affairs inevitably spawns people who see themselves as "winners," "losers," or somewhere in between. That is, if genuine controversy is assumed, it would be impossible to have only winners. Putting the moral issue aside for the moment, our conception of the ability to exercise influence recognizes (a) the impossibility of all persons winning <u>all</u> of the time, but the desirability of all citizens "winning" <u>some</u> of the time; (b) the fact that, in the process of "losing," even "losers" can exert influence on policy (for example, by demonstrating a power base that will have to be contended with in the future); and (c) that the necessity of modifying one's ideals in

order to exert influence in a particular situation is not ipso facto an indication of one's lack of ability to exert influence. Having one's way is surely implied in the concept of influence outlined above, but it cannot be taken to the extreme of an exclusive criterion for defining the concept. The point is to assist students in having some impact in public affairs, consistent with intentions which they develop through a process of rational and moral deliberation.

As a final point of clarification, note that the objective claims not to make all students active and influential in public affairs, but to help them develop the ability to be so if they wish. The extent to which a student becomes involved in public affairs should not be dictated by the schools, but left to the choice of individual students. If an individual has no opportunity to develop the ability to exercise influence, however, the option to exercise influence is really not available to him, and thus, he in effect has no choice. Without the ability, his only option is not to exercise influence. For these reasons such a curriculum must not be required of all students. It should be voluntary, but attractive enough to that many students will wish to take advantage of the opportunity. For those who do choose such a program it should be clear that the purpose of the curriculum is not to transform them into mackrakers, politicians, or crusaders, but to help them develop skills, abilities, attitudes that will make it possible for them to exercise influence according to whatever style they might choose.*

This educational objective stands in clear contrast to the primary objective of conventional instruction in public schools, where the goal

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*Some claim that only a small proportion of students would be interested in and capable of participating in such a curriculum. This point is discussed below, p. 27 ff.

especially in liberal arts and general education subjects (as opposed, for example, to vocational training) is to help students describe, define, evaluate, explain or analyze reality, but not directly to exert influence upon it. I do not deny that educators will often posit the ultimate aim of education as intelligent action, and that the purpose of study (whether in math, English, language, the arts, social sciences, etc.) is to provide conceptions of reality that make action more intelligent. The fact remains, however, that in their zeal to create programs of study that help students describe, explain or evaluate the world, educators have essentially allowed the means (study) to overshadow the end (influence or action). Analysis of reality tends to become an objective unto itself, and is usually not put to the service of affecting or exerting influence one one's environment. Even recent curriculum development efforts which claim to relate to citizen participation focus primarily on the gathering of data, the testing of propositions, the teaching of analytic frameworks, or in general the conduct of inquiry. The students' exercise of influence upon reality is not a central concept in the rationale, materials or actual teaching of most such projects.*

It has been suggested that the objective of exerting influence in public affairs would apply only to liberals, radicals or revolutionaries, but not to conservatives, for since conservatives are often assumed to be satisfied with the world as it is, or at least wish less intervention through governmental auspices, they advocate less change, and therefore have less

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*The work of Oliver and Shaver (1966) and Newmann and Oliver (1970), while placing exclusive emphasis on the analysis of public controversy, focuses, neverhteless, on skills in reasoning and discussion of policy disputes, not on implementing or action on one's views. The work of Mehlinger and Patrick (1972), Gillespie and Patrick (1972) and Gillespie and Mehlinger (1972) emphasizes citizen participation, but also places inquiry at a higher priority than action.

need for skills in the exercise of influence. I cannot agree. Persons who wish to curb governmental power and persons who wish existing policies to remain untouched often must exert influence to protect their interests, though admittedly the need for citizen action diminishes if particular ruling elites happen to represent their views. The felt need for actively exerting influence in public affairs depends less upon one's general ideological orientation and more upon whether one's interests happen to be served by those in power at a given time.

II. Justification of the Objective

For what reasons is the ability to exert influence in public affairs a desirable educational objective? I find rationale in theory on the nature of democracy, on the nature of morality, and on the nature of psychological growth.

A. Citizen Participation in Democracy

Most conceptions of consent of the governed, a central principle of democratic theory, emphasize the importance of citizen participation in public affairs. While some construe this participation as restricted mainly to periodic selection of leaders, others stipulate as a requirement for democracy that citizens should exercise continuous influence on governing elites. Several studies (e.g., Almond and Verba, 1963; Newmann, 1963) have shown, however, that actual citizen behavior does not conform to the myth of the rational activist under either interpretation. The majority does not participate in the nomination and election of officials at many levels, nor does it participate on specific issues between elections. Such low levels of participation can be attributed to lack of ability, lack of motivation or some combination of the two. Studies on citizens' knowledge of issues, knowledge of the nature of

public institutions and knowledge of political process indicate widespread ignorance. Assuming that knowledge on such matters is requisite for effective participation, we must conclude that, regardless of the motivation problem, most citizens are not capable of exercising influence.*

It has also been argued, however, that high levels of mass participation would be detrimental to democracy. That is, if governing elites were continually bombarded by effective citizen lobbying on all sides of all the decisions they make, it would be impossible to make and enforce stable policy. In this sense it is important that those who govern not be required to respond to the every wish of every citizen. We might agree that, taken to its logical extreme, citizen participation could conceivably result in a breakdown of the governing system. To educate citizens to maximize their ability to exert influence, however, will not necessarily lead to this result. Whether most citizens would actually engage in massive participation on most issues, if they had the ability, remains to be seen, but we have reason to believe this would be unlikely.

If we were to examine those few citizens who do have the ability to exert influence and who choose to participate, I believe we would find selective and episodic, rather than universal and continuous, participation. This may be due in part to the limited amount of time available for involvement in public affairs, in part to lack of satisfaction derived from participation. It may also reflect an acceptance (not often voiced explicitly) of the fact that energetic bombardment of the public and the governing elites on all issues could lead to the breakdown of the very process which has the

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*The ability to exert influence is not simply a function of education. By virtue of their wealth, the rich can exert more influence than the poor. The hope is that through education some of the disparities arising from unequal resources will be reduced.

potential of responding to one's interests. Effective individuals exercise their influence more discreetly by channeling individual efforts through groups, by using their power selectively. On this point and also on the belief that the pursuit of our educational objective will not increase motivation to participate astronomically, I see no reason to predict that increased citizen ability to participate will lead to levels of participation harmful to democratic process.

Even Almond and Verba (1963) who decry continuous massive citizen participation as inimical to democracy argue that all citizens must have the ability to exert influence, be it used only occasionally. Unless elites believe that all citizens have the potential for high levels of participation they will respond during their term of office only to the interests of special groups. To the extent that there is a disparity in the abilities of individuals and groups to exert influence on the elites, we fall short of the ideal of consent of the governed.

B. Morality

For the moment let us consider the ability intentionally to exert influence, that is, the ability deliberately to act in a way that affects reality, without restricting our concerns to public affairs. We will examine the significance of such ability from an ethical point of view, and I will argue that the less ability one has to exert influence, the more difficult it becomes to consider himself a moral being.

I define a moral being as someone who deliberates upon what he ought to do in situations that involve possible conflicts between self-interests and the interests of others. Some philosophers may require only that a person deliberate upon what ought to be done, but not necessarily upon what

he as an individual ought to do. I believe, however, that unless our deliberation focuses upon our own individual rights, duties, responsibilities, obligations, etc., [illegible] what we ought to do, such deliberation is empty, academic, unrel[illegible]e realities of our existence. I must stipulate, therefore, that [illegible] nature derives from the existential necessity of deciding what we ought to do. Deliberating upon what ought to be done in a general sense, and what others ought to do is important, but unless this is supplemented by a concern for what I as an individual ought to do, I cannot properly be considered a moral being.*

I will argue that the fewer abilities we have to exert influence on reality, the less able we are to deliberate about what we ought to do. Suppose while walking upon a deserted beach I come upon a swimmer calling for help 15 yards from shore. Nearby there are a canoe and paddle, several loose strands of rope, an automobile with keys in the ignition. I recognize as a general moral principle or prima facie duty that one should assist persons in distress. Suppose, however, that I do not know how to swim, manage a canoe, tie knots, or drive an auto. I have no knowledge of where I might find the nearest person or telephone. Because of such overwhelming incompetence, it is meaningless to ask what I "ought to do." Because I can do nothing to influence the situation, what I ought to do is not a genuine question.** If my incompetence prevents me from asking this question, it has in a sense deprived me of the essence of my nature as a moral being.

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*In arriving at this conception of moral being I have depended upon the work of Hampshire (1959), Hare (1963), Frankena (1963), Baier (1965), and Wilson, Williams and Sugarman (1967), although none of them has articulated an interpretation identical to mine.

**Hare (1963) provides a more thorough discussion of the point that "ought" implies "can."

By way of contrast, suppose that I was highly skilled in life-saving, canoeing, knot tying, driving, and that I knew how to summon help at this place. Thanks to these varied abilities, I could exert influence in any of these ways. Such abilities have created for me a choice among actions, and have thereby given birth to the important question, "what should I do?" Endowed with the ability to exert influence I am now capable of asking what I ought to do and it is, therefore, easier to consider myself a moral being. Such abilities are important not only because they help to make the important question "askable," but also because they make it more possible for a person to act in accordance with prima facie ethical duties.

The claim that our ability to exert influence in the world is critical to our existence as moral agents should be interpreted with care. This claim does not require an individual to harbor specific intentions, make specific judgments, or act in specific ways that philosophers might consider correct. A super-competent person in the above situation could conceivably choose not to help the drowning person for a variety of reasons, some of which might be considered selfish and immoral, others of which might be considered ethically justifiable. A totally incompetent person might make heroic attempts to save the swimmer, yet both would die in the process. Whether an individual wishes to attempt a rescue, actually attempts a rescue, or succeeds in rescuing the swimmer is not central to my point, although such matters may be significant in making moral judgments of other types. At this point I claim only that one critical and defining feature (perhaps necessary but not sufficient) of a moral being is his ability to deliberate about what he as an individual ought to do. The point of the swimmer analogy is to demonstrate that to the

extent that we lack the ability to influence reality, we also are deprived of the chance to inquire about what we ought to do.*

I have attempted to show that the ability to exert influence is important not simply from the view of democratic theory; that even putting citizen participation and public affairs aside, it is a critical aspect of our humanity as moral beings. We can further illustrate this point, however, with reference to public issues. Imagine a student who, in the process of studying reformatories and other institutions for "youthful offenders," concludes that reforms are needed and that he ought to be active in working toward certain policy changes. He writes a letter to a prison official and one to his congressman, requesting that they each take whatever steps are necessary to implement his proposed policies (e.g., more licensed foster homes for offenders and runaways. Both letters are answered with the noncomittal: "Thank you for your interest. I will certainly consider your suggestions." The student concludes that nothing more can be done to advance his cause. He is unaware that other actions that might be taken (e.g., finding and working with organizations that have already advocated similar policies, developing a new organization, working for the election of candidates who support his views, etc.). His lack of knowledge of such approaches has rendered him powerless to act on what he considered to be his <u>prima facie</u> moral obligations.**

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*As mentioned earlier, the ability to exert influence is not simply a function of individual skills, knowledge, attitudes, etc. People can be limited by physical disabilities, economic deprivation, incarceration, and other factors. My definition does not intend to suggest that persons restricted by such factors are less "moral" than persons not so restricted. However, to the extent that such factors deprive a person of asking what he ought to do they also limit his opportunity to function as a moral being.

**Even if he had more sophisticated knowledge of techniques of exerting influence, he might still have chosen to drop the matter, if he felt, for example, that it would involve too much work or self-sacrifice. The point remains that without such knowledge, the option to pursue his convictions was not as readily available to him.

C. Psychological Development

We can also examine ability to exert influence from a psychological point of view. The claim here is that such ability is important for the development of ego-strength, identity, efficacy, or other terms which have been linked to a sense of self-worth. Having assumed a sense of self-worth as a basic human need, I will suggest that to meet this need one must have the ability to exercise influence in one's environment, and that public affairs, for many people, occupy an increasingly significant part of that environment.

Theories of White (1959), Erikson (1968), and Fried (1970), while not dealing specifically with public affairs, point to the developmental necessity for persons behaving in an active rather than passive role. A healthy identity requires that a person be able to act upon the environment in such a way that the environment responds to some degree in accordance with the actor's intentions. The child stomps through a mud puddle to see what a tremendous splash he can make. The adolescent rebuilds an auto to see, hear and feel the difference he can make. The homemaker sews new curtains in part for the same purpose. Attempts to affect the environment in these and countless other ways can be explained as efforts to develop a sense of efficacy, identity, or self-worth. Those who function in a totally passive role, waiting for the environment to act upon them cannot function with much satisfaction and in extreme cases cannot survive. This general ability to assert onseself, to influence happenings, is central to White's concept of competence, it is especially evident in the Eriksonian stages of autonomy, initiative, industry, identity, generativity, and integrity; and according to Fried, it is "the crucial psychological dimension."

One might agree with this general point, but still question the importance to every person of exerting influence in public affairs. People can evidently derive a sense of efficacy from their actions in work, recreation, family life, and interpersonal relationships. One might even find examples of psychologically healthy persons who are uninterested in public issues and who feel incompetent to affect them. The argument has been made that the larger political-economic system is essentially out of control, unresponsive to intentional input from citizens, headed toward inevitable deterioration and decay, and that, therefore, people should not waste their time on cosmic or macro issues of public policy. They could gain their sense of efficacy by restructuring personal relationships, by developing local communities which try to operate outside of the larger system. Thus energies should be directed toward the organization of a local craft cooperative, a neighborhood cooperative, day care or health clinic, a parent-run school, a peer counseling group, etc., but not toward changing the Defense Department, IBM, the state university, or the auto insurance industry.

While I agree that achieving a sense of efficacy in areas not related to global social issues can, in many cases, serve ego needs identified here, I also believe that for most people this is insufficient. Because of powerful methods of information collection and dissemination (through TV and other media) public issues now impinge on our consciousness with increasing frequency and intensity and, though people may feel powerless, most do hold strong views in selected areas of public affairs. Even those persons who deliberately choose to ignore the larger "macro" issues, working instead toward more local, "private" alternatives as suggested above, of necessity become involved in public affairs in two ways. First, to the extent they are engaged in forming

institutions of concern to groups of people (co-ops, communes, etc.), they are involved in problems of governance, and establishing and maintaining community norms. Second, to implement their plans in many cases they do have to confront policies of the establishment (e.g., regulations on licensing, building facilities, taxes, care of minors, etc.). For these reasons the anxiety we experience because of a sense of powerlessness to exert influence on the "macro" issues (e.g., war-peace, structure of the economy, urban development, etc.), can be reduced only partially and temporarily by ignoring the public realm and investing ourselves exclusively in the "private" realm.

In recalling our definition of public and private affairs, it should be clear that a sense of efficacy in public affairs should not be considered synonymous with a sense of omnipotence in dealing with the most global and system-wide issues. Psychological needs mentioned in this section might be satisfied by the development of the ability to publish a student newspaper, to organize a Black Students Union, to persuade a school administration to change its policy on student files. The point is that for psychological development to proceed in a healthy way, the student must learn to act in ways that allow him to gain a sense of exerting influence, of affecting his environment, and that the scope of this influence must extend beyond the strictly private realm of, say, decorating his bedroom.

III. Social Action as a Means

Much questioning of the curriculum I propose is based not on disagreement with the objective of increasing ability to exert influence, but on reluctance to involve students in social action projects in the community. In the last section of this chapter I will deal with many of these objections in detail, but here I wish first to define social action and then to indicate why it is potentially a reasonable means for achieving the objective.

Many may equate social action only with militant forms of public protest (marches, demonstrations, boycotts, etc.), but such is not the intent here. Social action should be construed more generally as any behavior directed toward exerting influence in public affairs. As such it can include phone conversations, letter-writing, participation in meetings, research and study, testifying before public bodies, door-to-door canvassing, fund-raising, media production, bargaining and negotiation, and publicly visible work associated with the more militant forms. Social action can take place in or out of school; if out of school, not necessarily in the streets, but in homes, offices and workplaces. It might involve movement among several locations or concentration at one.

The types of issues can vary considerably. Students may wish to work for better bicycle trails, improved low-income housing, a "freer school, improved counseling services for runaways, the election of a particular official. They might wish to oppose a curfew ordinance, high rise apartments, credit practices of a particular firm, or a school's dress code. In pursuing such issues students may be cast in the role of creative initiators or critical protestors and some will be leaders, others followers.

This far-ranging conception should indicate the difficulty of claiming that social action as a pedagogical device will guarantee students' gaining ability to exert influence in public affairs. We are all probably aware of activists who, in spite of high levels of participation, remain notoriously ineffective in exerting influence; they apparently learn very little through participation. An inspiring classroom lecture on the nature of representative government might conceivably give them more help in exerting influence than participation in poorly executed community projects. It is my belief that

learning is more likely to be facilitated if social action projects occur as part of a more general curriculum aimed at developing the ability to exert influence, an agenda of which is proposed in Chapter 2. For these reasons, my argument must be limited to the claim that social action projects as a genre of activity are a necessary, but not a sufficient, means for increasing students' ability to exert influence in public affairs.

They are necessary, because they provide direct involvement in situations and problems which not only approximate but are equivalent to the experience implied by the educational objective. Unfortunately, the argument for social action as a means to teach ability to influence public affairs is virtually circular, for the objective logically implies the means. It is similar to the problem we might have in explaining why students who wish to learn to swim should have an opportunity to be in the water. Learning to swin, by definition, requires "involvement" in water. Learning to exert influence in public affairs by definition requires involvement in attempts to influence public affairs, that is, social action projects.

Social action projects can be the primary focus of laboratory experience which itself is a main component of a general curriculum in the exercise of influence. The laboratory for such a curriculum must be "well-equipped" with people in different roles (public officials, reporters, housewives, businessmen, laborers, parents, students) holding different views and able to wield varying amounts of power on certain issues. It must have access to a variety of channels of communication such as mail, phone, radio, TV, printed media. Laboratory work will be done at a variety of sites: offices in public and private buildings, committee rooms, auditoriums, living rooms, sidewalks, parks, and school. Curriculum materials will include legal documents,

correspondence, books, magazines, films, research studies, budgets. The type of "apparatus" needed, and the site of the work will depend primarily upon the type of issue on which students attempt to exert influence, but it should be clear that social action projects in general will require access to resources beyond the school building. That social action projects might take students to a variety of places in a community, involve them with persons other than certified teachers, place them in the position of challenging the policies of existing regimes or adult authority in general--this general image of student activity has stimulated a variety of objections to social action curriculum to which we must respond.

IV. Objections to Social Action Curriculum

First, there are questions as to whether social action projects will in fact successfully increase student ability to exert influence. Some claim that school teachers are not qualified to teach such a curriculum. Others point out that adults in the community with whom students might work will not necessarily know how to teach. Still others argue that adolescents, by virtue of not having reached adulthood, are incapable of learning what must be learned.

I am fully aware of the lack of teacher preparation in this area and will, in Chapter 3, speak in more detail to particular deficiencies, not only in training, but in conceptions of the teacher's role which may hinder success in this area. I also agree that adults involved in public affairs are not, because of that fact, necessarily good teachers. Thus, a school program would have to give interested teachers an opportunity to acquire knowledge and skills consistent with the proposed new curriculum. Community volunteers might assist teachers, but they too would probably need training to be effective with

students. Lack of skilled staff is admittedly a roadblock to immediate implementation. At this early stage of development, however, such a criticism does not seem to jeopardize the educational rationale behind such a curriculum.

Probable failure of social action curriculum can also be attributed to the nature of adolescence. It has been characterized as a stage of life in which the individual's egocentric and interpersonal concerns take priority over concern for public affairs, where one is oriented to the immediate and the present rather than the future, where confusion, inconsistency and unpredictability seem to prevail over ideology and clarity of commitment. Many adolescents may not have reached higher stages in cognitive and moral development which seem to facilitate effective participation. Because adolescents do not participate in the adult roles of breadwinning, child-rearing, and governing, they are also said to be ill-prepared for decision-making in public affairs. If this were a complete description of most adolescents, prospects for the effectiveness of social action curriculum would be dim indeed.

However, adolescence has also been described as a time when individuals begin to transcend egocentric orientations, developing the ability for sociocentric thinking. It is a time of profound social idealism for many. It has also been suggested that adolescents might be more objective and fair-minded in their approach to public affairs precisely because they are not trapped by adult roles and vested power interests. Their apparent fickleness has also been construed as healthy flexibility, and the desire for role experimentation might be put to constructive purposes within social action efforts. Many adolescents have enough time for participation more intense and continuous than adults.

One's judgment on whether adolescents are capable of effective participation depends upon one's conception of skills necessary to exert influence.

Although in Chapter 2 we develop an imposing cluster of competencies, attitudes, etc., it should be emphasized here that influence can be exerted in a variety of ways, requiring different skills. As students work to develop personal styles of participation, some may find their strength in gathering information, others in disseminating and publicizing information, others in public debate, others in keeping a group working together, still others in competent performance of routine clerical work. We do not expect all students to become Clarence Darrows or Lyndon Johnsons, and thus must recognize a wide range of abilities or capabilities, any number of which can enhance an individual's ability to exert influence.

For these reasons, we must conclude that whether adolescents are "capable" of effective participation in social action projects is at least problematic, and this needs to be determined more conclusively through development and research on curriculum. Even if we were to find that the majority of adolescents were "incapable," under the best possible educational program, of increasing their ability to exert influence, we still have an obligation to provide such instruction for a small minority that could benefit.

We should evaluate educational programs not only by asking whether proposed means accomplish a proposed objective. Having reasoned that proposed means have the potential for achieving a proposed objective, we should also ask whether the program might be undesirable on other grounds. In addition to the central effect of increasing student ability to exert influence in public affairs, a social action curriculum could conceivably have a number of other effects on individual students and the community at large. Effects considered negative by some critics are listed below in Figure 2.

Effects on Individual Students

1. Lack of knowledge or grave misconceptions about social reality and the subjects of history and social science.

2. Impulsive, unrelfective tendency to act rather than critically to reflect upon and study social problems.

3. Increaseddisillusionment with and alienation from the social system.

Effects on the Community

4. School becomes a tool for special political interests rather than a neutral resource for all people.

5. Increased conflict and polarization in the community.

6. Deterioration in the quality of public policy due to excessive participation by inexperienced youth.

7. Wasted resources on education since the curriculum will benefit only an extremely small proportion of the total student body.

FIGURE 2. POSSIBLE "NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES OF SOCIAL ACTION CURRICULUM

These possible consequences raise both the normative issue of deciding whether they should be considered undesirable and the empirical one of predicting the probability of their occurrence. Although space does not permit extensive discussion of the normative problem and the empirical issue cannot really be settled without further development and research, the salience of these concerns in the minds of teachers, administrators, parents and students compels us to attempt a response to each point in order.

1. If students substitute social action curriculum for conventional courses in history and the social sciences, they will obviously not gain all the knowledge offered in such courses. It does not follow, however, that they will thereby fail to learn any history or social science. It should be apparent from the curriculum agenda (Chapter 2) that research on social policy, a critical

component of social action curriculum, will introduce them to large amounts of data and generalizations which beckon for interpretation and testing in a manner that represents historical and social scientific investigation.* Furthermore, it is assumed that to be effective in exerting influence, students cannot act on the basis of ignorance and misconceptions. Unless they are knowledgeable about social reality, they will fail in the realm of action. On these grounds, we can predict increased knowledge in history and social science, although the specifics of this knowledge may not conform to that transmitted in conventional courses. Hopefully, students who choose social action curriculum will also have the opportunity to take conventional coursework in these areas if they wish.

2. Some may claim that action is inherently anti-intellectual in the sense that once one decides to act, he in effect refuses to engage in further inquiry on certain questions. (Once you decide to work for passage of an equal rights amendment on the grounds that women are victims of widespread discrimination, your work does not really allow you to question the truth of the claim of widespread discrimination.) Though we agree that action tends to define limits within which inquiry occurs, we cannot characterize action as anti-intellectual, impulsive or unreflective. To be effective the activist must inquire and reflect upon a variety of questions and, like the scholar, he is expected to defend his conclusions to others.** Some of these questions may involve complicated social research (the relative long term costs of building

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*Ochoa and Manson (1972) argue that social action curriculum can be a vehicle for integrating the teaching of social science and social issues.

**We should note that perhaps one of the defining characteristics of disciplined scholarship is the tendency carefully to restrict one's area of inquiry. Once a research scientist begins a particular experiment he, like the activist, prohibits himself from asking certain questions so that others may be investigated thoroughly. It would be inappropriate to describe this as anti-intellectual or impulsive behavior.

new highways or developing mass transit to solve transportation needs), and ethical analysis (should I sign a petition supporting legalized abortion). Although social action may be undertaken impulsively and without critical reflection, the point of including social action in school curriculum is precisely to remedy this deficiency. If the curriculum agenda in Chapter 2 is implemented, it would hopefully increase, rather than decrease, reflective behavior by students.

3. Will student participation in social action projects tend to increase their faith in the political-economic system under which we live, or more generally in democratic ideals? Some observers fear that sutdents, by becoming involved in public affairs, will learn more of the shortcomings of our institutions, will see more dramatically the disparity between ideals and reality (e.g., hypocrisy, corruption, incompetence in government), will find continual frustration in their attempts to affect society, and will, therefore, become increasingly disillusioned, alienated, apathetic, or possibly revolutionary. Part of this prediction can be dismissed by recalling that at this point we are assuming we have a curriculum which in fact increases student ability to exert influence in public affairs. The lack of ability to exert influence would not, therefore, be a source of disillusionment.

We cannot deny, however, the possibility that even persons capable of exerting influence and having a sense of efficacy might eventually choose to drop out or take desperate revolutionary action. My belief is that most persons who gain increased ability to exert influence will feel better able to cope with the system and thus less inclined toward either withdrawal or revolution. Nevertheless, if this is considered a possible consequence, it is a risk we must take in order to find out whether the society is seriously committed to (and whether the system can handle) citizen participation. To deny students the opportunity

to exert influence in public affairs on the grounds that it would reduce their commitment to democracy (i.e., to both the ideals and the particular system which claims to have implemented the ideal--at least more completely than other systems) would be a ludicrous contradiction.

4. For those who view the school as a neutral, impartial citadel of wisdom that stands above the biases and passions of political and economic life, the prospect of school-sponsored student involvement in public affairs can be frightening indeed. The fear is that groups with special political-economic interests will begin to determine curriculum content, thereby violating the professional integrity which educators bring to subject matter, and also possibly limiting academic freedom and freedom of speech, if passions and commitments to causes replace dispassionate inquiry. Whether one accepts or rejects the claim of political neutrality for the school will affect one's response to this point.

First let us accept the claim that the school ought to be as politically neutral as possible; it should be a model of pluralism in which students are free to learn about a variety of political philosophies, cultural styles, and that inquiry should not be restricted by the temporary objectives of special political, economic, or ethnic groups. The academic justification for political neutrality of schools is to stimulate unrestricted investigation of far-ranging alternative answers to the important questions of life, not to isolate students from them. Various attempts to exert influence in public affairs are one important source of such questions and answers. A constitutional justification for political neutrality is to give all groups a reasonably equal chance to express themselves. For both of these reasons, the school should design programs which help <u>every</u> student increase his ability to exert influence, whether he holds a minority or majority point of view, whether he belongs to a group that has slight or awesome power. Student action projects should be able to confront

and oppose each other: some may work for increased welfare payments, others for decreases; some may lobby for more parks, others for more parking lots; opposing candidates might each have students working in their organizations.* To the extent that a school is committed to pluralism of this sort, it can set policies that will stimulate free inquiry and will prevent itself from becoming a "tool" of special interests. In this sense it will remain politically neutral, although its students will be politically active.

A school might allow or even encourage social action projects considered "constructive" (volunteer programs for the Red Cross), but prohibit others (e.g., a campaign to expose financial investments of school officials). To the extent that projects are prohibited not for moral or legal reasons, but to maintain the power of a particular regime, the school cannot be considered politically neutral. In fact, many will deny that schools have been or even can be neutral, because their very existence depends upon the political and economic support of constituencies with specific biases, and these biases shape curriculum. Social action projects, given this interpretation, may assist students in exerting influence in public affairs, but only in directions approved by the establishment. This is admittedly inconsistent withthe pluralistic philosophy I advocate, but indoctrination, partisanship, or one-sidedness arising from attempts of groups to maintain power are problems that pervade all curricula; they are not unique to social action curriculum. If we conclude that schools by their nature are inevitably involved in power maintenance, then the question is not whether schools should support student involvement in social action projects, but whether schools will tolerate <u>any</u> learning which might pose a threat to the values and policies of existing regimes or authorities.

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*As indicated above, pp. 2-3, and further in Chapter 2, this position does not require the school to endorse all actions that students might choose. Sanctions can be placed upon actions considered illegal or immoral. The more that school officials unreasonably prohibit student action, however, the less successful they will be in achieving the objective of the curriculum.

5. Heightened student ability to exert influence in public affairs implies for some a general increase in community conflict, consternation, polarization. Such a prediction is not necessarily warranted. We have not yet discussed the numbers or percentages of students who might become actively involved as a result of social action curriculum, but it is conceivable that even if ability to exert influence increases, general levels and intensity of participation could remain low. Some have even predicted that such curriculum could bring increased awareness of the complexity of the system, thus more patience and less "noise" in public affairs. Even those students who do become highly involved may choose issues of limited interest to the community at large (forming a Black Students Union; expanded counseling service for runaways; distributing a student newspaper in school). Some students might engage in action projects aimed precisely at reducing conflict and polarization (e.g., publicly sponsored rap groups, hearings, lectures, TV programs, etc.). Conflict on some matters might increase and others decrease as a result of social action curriculum. Finally, we must emphasize that increased level of conflict is not necessarily undesirable, for it may be a necessary stage in resolving certain social problems and it can contribute to individual growth. Increased ability to exert influence in public affairs would hopefully involve the ability to use and manage conflict towards such desirable ends.

One manifestation of the concern for the generation of excessive conflict in the community is a fear that students will, through social action projects, expose themselves to risks of personal injury both physical and psychological. Will they be beaten, gassed, arrested, verbally abused, publicized, given a record or reputation that will haunt them the rest of their lives? The conception of social action curriculum proposed here does not

entail such risks. First, we have indicated that militant, publicly visible forms of protest constitute only one of many types of social action. Second, the point of developing a curriculum for social action is precisely to assist students in evaluating more systematically the way in which they wish to participate. Those initially inclined to the riskier forms of action should be encouraged to examine the risks carefully. If students happen to choose a course of action which a teacher could not condone (e.g., illegal acts of civil disobedience), the teacher must make students aware of the risks, indicate that the school in no way supports or sponsors such activity, and, with the students' knowledge, inform parents of the school's position. According to our experience, this is unlikely to arise, but if it does, teachers and school officials charged with legal responsibility for students have a clear obligation to help students avoid personal injury. This obligation is not equivalent, however, to insulating students from participation in disputes over public affairs.

6. If it is difficult to predict whether conflict will increase as a result of student involvement in social action, it is impossible to know whether public policy will become more or less enlightened. The objective of helping students exert influence in public affairs is not put forth on the grounds that more justice, wisdom or rationality in public policy will ensue. Some may feel that youth lack the experience, knowledge and maturity to govern and that their increased participation will, therefore, downgrade the quality of government. If I were to argue that all persons above the age of five be given full rights of adult citizenship, this might be cause for concern. But since I am not arguing this, nor that youth be given exclusive control over any issue, the criticism is misplaced. In public affairs youth will have to learn how to deal with adults who hold power, and if adults in their "more mature wisdom"

require only certain types of arguments documented by certain types of evidence, then youth will have to conform to such standards if they expect to exert influence.

Even if youth gained enough political-legal-economic power to control a community, we need not necessarily anticipate a deterioration in the wisdom of policy. Some have even argued that youth, because of the "innocence" (that is, lack of vested interests, axes to grind, power to maintain), can more objectively study what is needed for the good of the community as a whole. Although I do not accept this, I do believe that variance in intelligence, ability to govern, and values among youth is probably as great as it is among adults. Thus youth could be expected to make about the same kinds of mistakes as adults, and in that sense are equally "qualified." Although this point is less significant than the first, the two combined compel us to conclude that an increase or decrease in the quality of public policy as a result of student involvement is virtually unpredictable.

7. Those who may not be troubled by points discussed above might still reject social action curriculum on the grounds that it would serve only that small minority, say 5 percent of the total student population, who take an active interest in public affairs. I believe this percentage estimate is based on a conception of activism far more restrictive than intended by this proposal, and for that reason the estimate is much too low. The goal is not to serve only the potential Ralph Naders, Martin Luther Kings, William Buckleys, Gloria Steinhems, or Richard Nixons. We are not equating activism or ability to exert influence with crusaders and leaders of national movements. The needs of the average citizen relate more to participation in local groups whose concerns and causes are not usually widely publicized, but whose

activities, nevertheless, relate to public affairs: a local organization for the mentally retarded wants to influence school curriculum to be more responsive to its constituency, a local chapter of the Urban League wants a summer recreation program to put more resources into ghetto playgrounds; a local motorcycle club needs permission to hold races on vacant public land; a church's social action committee wants youth appointed to municipal committees; an audubon club wants to protect natural areas from highway expansion; a theatre group seeks public subsidy. This is but a small sample of hundreds of organizations whose activities are generally considered voluntary and private, but who often take action in public affairs. Many such organizations may be dominated by adults, but youth do participate in many of those listed above, and they could dominate in some. If our conception of social action is broadened to include such activities, our estimated percentage of potential "activists" in the population at large could escalate to a majority.

Since I advocate this broader conception of social action I do not accept the prediction that the curriculum would be relevant only to a small minority of the population. Yet, even if the curriculum is construed more narrowly to apply just to a few visible political activists, there is some justification for developing and offering it. To the extent that any minority ought to have its educational needs met, the activists deserve attention. If majority interest were a criterion for all educational offerings, schools would probably have to abolish instruction in a variety of areas from French to physics to gymnastics to flute playing.* Second, for those critical of our statesmen, people of power, the visible activists in the society, we might suggest that specific attention to action in public affairs as part of their

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*If the total curriculum were voluntary, I doubt that we would find a majority of students interested in any given subject.

formal education might improve the quality of their work. Although at this time I am not willing to defend the point, such a curriculum, if well taught, could conceivably help that small minority of activists become more responsible, judicious, etc., performing a better service for the public at large.

Having considered each of seven possible negative consequences presented in Figure 2, we could now add, as in Figure 3, a parallel list of possible positive consequences.* It should be clear from our discussion that actual

NEGATIVE	POSITIVE
Effects on Individual Students	
1. Decreased ability to exert influence in public affairs.	1. Increased ability to exert influence.
2. Lack of knowledge & misconceptions about social reality, history & social science.	2. Increased knowledge and improved conceptions about social reality, history and social science.
3. Impulsive, unrelfective tendency to act rather than critically to reflect upon social problems.	3. Tendency to base action more on reflection and study than on impulse.
4. Increased disillusionment with and alienation from the social system.	4. Increased determination to work within the system rather than to drop out.
Effects on Community	
5. School becomes a tool for special political interests rather than neutral resource for all people.	5. School becomes a more relevant neutral resource for all people, as it helps people become active.
6. Increased conflict and polarization in the community.	6. Increase in constructive use of conflict.
7. Deterioration in the quality of public policy due to excessive participation by inexperienced youth.	7. Improvement in public policy because of wider and better educated citizen participation.
8. Wasted resources on education since the curriculum will benefit only an extremely small proportion of the student body.	8. Well-invested resources in a large segment of the student body, or if in a small segment, one that deserves it.

FIGURE 3. POSSIBLE "NEGATIVE" AND "POSITIVE" CONSEQUENCES OF SOCIAL ACTION CURRICULUM

*See following page for this footnote.

consequences of social action curriculum will depend more upon the idiosyncratic way in which it is implemented in a community than on the generally conceived objective and means presented here. One educator might promise to design his curriculum in such a way to insure achievement of the "positive" goals only. Another will claim that implementation cannot be controlled sufficiently to insure those goals, and that lack of control will inevitably lead to the negative ones. A third might reply that lack of control over specific types of student involvement leads necessarily neither to the positive or negative consequences. In this effort at developing rationale, I have tried to demonstrate only that anticipation of the negative consequences is not logically warranted, given my definition of ability to exert influence in public affairs and social action. More definite conclusions about the actual outcomes of social action curriculum growing out of this model will have to await empirical investigation.

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*According to authors such as Bronfenbrenner (1970) and Coleman (1972), excessive age segregation between youth and adults in our society is harmful to the socialization process. If adults and youth were to come together to work on common action goals, they would have more opportunity to communicate and examine the nature of adult-youth relations. Improved relations over the generation gap could, therefore, be a by-product of student involvement in social action. Although I do not wish to make the case for social action curriculum on these grounds, benefits such as these are conceivable, and could be presented more thoroughly. Dan Conrad (1973) argues, for example, that volunteerism in the community contributes to the developmental transition between childhood and adulthood.

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